garnish

A Taste of Elegance

december 2008

Holiday Party 16

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Try shrimp and artichoke dip

Festival of Lights

Spice up your holiday season
with Santa Lucia Day dishes 2

Hazelnuts

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from the editor

At the end of each year, it seems we are thrown headfirst into another holiday season full of twinkling lights and neighborhood gifts, when we could swear the holidays just ended. With all the pressures that come with the season, it's easy to get bogged down in the outward manifestations and forget its purpose—celebrating with those we love.

For me, the holiday season never gets old. I look forward to each one with almost child-like anticipation. The gathering of family, the contacting of old friends, and the celebrating of yearly traditions—even the silly ones—make me fall in love with the holidays all over again.

From my earliest memories, the most important part of the holidays has been the food, such as homemade candies, simmering wassail, and Mom's melt-in-your-mouth turkey and stuffing. Enjoying good food with friends and family has always pervaded my fond memories of and happy anticipation for this wonderful season.

In this issue, we explore many ways to help you celebrate the season with food, as well as some ways to use food that aren't necessarily related to the holidays. It is our hope at *Garnish* that we can provide innovative ideas and quality recipes that will help you enhance all of your gatherings and make them memorable for you and your loved ones.

I hope that you find delight in each of the following pages; take some of the ideas, recipes, and knowledge from this December 2008 issue of *Garnish* and make them a part of your holiday traditions for years to come.

Megan Andersen
Managing Editor

photograph by Jason S.

festival of lights

Santa Lucia Day

by Julia Manning

Many know that the Hanukkah celebration each December is a festival of lights. However, Hanukkah is not the only festival that commemorates light during the holiday season. In Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, people celebrate a festival of lights called Santa Lucia Day. This festival revolves around candles that bring hope, peace, and promise to the dark and dreary days of winter.

This holiday is celebrated on December 13, which was the day of the winter solstice and longest night of the year when the holiday was first created. Due to the change from the Gregorian to the Roman calendar during the Renaissance, the winter solstice moved to December 21. Santa Lucia Day did not change; nonetheless, it still represents the long nights of darkness coming to an end.

The Story of Santa Lucia

Santa Lucia was a Sicilian Christian during the fourth century. She is a prominent saint for Sweden because she once visited the country, and she is best known and remembered for her love and kindness. As the story goes, she wasn't in love with a man who wanted to marry her, so she turned him away. He became very angry that she wouldn't comply with his wishes, and he decided to punish her for her rejection by burning her at the stake. She prayed for God's protection and received it because of the kindness she had always shown to those around her. Because the power of God stopped the vicious flames from consuming Lucia, the man pierced her with a sword while she sang songs of gratitude to God. Although the flames caused her no harm, she ultimately passed away from the sword wound.

Traditions of the Festival

To emulate Santa Lucia, every December 13 the oldest daughter in the household dons a white robe and a candled wreath upon her head to give her the appearance of an angel. She carries traditional food to her parents in the wee hours of the morning. Oftentimes, the other children also dress up. The boys wear white robes and pointed hats with a star on top. The other daughters wear white robes and carry a single candle. The children follow in procession behind the oldest daughter as they bring light and goodies to the parents' room.

The candles that are so prominent on Santa Lucia Day are symbolic of the fire that miraculously didn't consume Santa Lucia. They represent hope and tie in with the seasonal change of increasing daylight after the passing of the winter solstice. These candles burn in the windows of houses all December long to serve as a reminder that the long nights of darkness are coming to an end. Lucia's name in Latin means "light," which further emphasizes the importance of light during the dreary winter season. The candles are a symbol of hope in a world of gloom.

Every December 13 the oldest daughter in the household dons a white robe and a candled wreath upon her head to give her the appearance of an angel.

Another important tradition during this winter celebration is singing. Because Santa Lucia was singing when she died, a number of traditional songs are sung all over Sweden in celebration of the day. One song is specifically about Santa Lucia. It talks about an angel of light coming out of the black night, bringing hope with her to Sweden and to each family. Sweden holds numerous processionals during the month for all the children; they sing and march through the streets in celebration of Santa Lucia. Each child dresses in the traditional white robe and carries a candle, and the boys wear their pointed hats.

The traditional foods of this festive holiday include *lussekatter*, or saffron buns; *pepparkakor*, Swedish ginger thins; and coffee. These foods are an important tradition in all of the festivities that surround Santa Lucia Day.

Besides the few traditional foods eaten on the morning of Santa Lucia Day, there are other dishes that are part of Swedish traditions in December and that often find their way into Santa Lucia Day celebrations. On the first weekend of December, the month's celebrating begins with *glogg*, a type of mulled wine to which the Swedish people add cinnamon sticks, vanilla pods, cloves, and sugar. They also eat little cakes and ginger snaps. For Christmas day, families gather together and have a *smorgasbord*, including Swedish meatballs, that lasts through dinner and all night long.

Santa Lucia around the World

Although Santa Lucia is most commonly linked with Sweden, it is also celebrated in a few other countries around the world, each with their own respective traditions.

Because Santa Lucia was Italian, this holiday is celebrated in parts of Italy, primarily in Sicily, where she lived. The Italians, however, have their own rendition of the holiday and their own traditions. They believe that Santa Lucia brought relief from famine. As a result, parts of the festivities include eating *cuccia*, a boiled wheat berry dessert.

Historically, Denmark did not celebrate Santa Lucia Day. But in 1944 the president of Denmark decided to make it a national holiday; he declared it was important for their country because it brought hope to a world of darkness, referring to the devastation of World War II around them. Since then, Denmark has celebrated Santa Lucia Day each year.

In the United States, particularly in areas where there are greater populations of Scandinavians, such as Wisconsin and Minnesota, gift giving is a popular part of Santa Lucia Day. Families often give special gifts to each other, like Christmas ornaments, or hold a special exchange of gifts between family members.

Santa Lucia Day is festive and exciting—an event that many look forward to during the cold winter months. This celebration of hope, like the saint it honors, serves to show the people of Sweden and the rest of the world that brighter days lie ahead and gives the world a reason to rejoice in the wonderful delights of life. ■

Saffron Buns

Yields: 16 buns
Prep time: 45 minutes (and 2 hours to rise)
Total time: 3 hours 5 minutes

Buns

¼ cup hot water

¼ teaspoon crushed saffron threads

½ cup whole milk

⅓ cup sugar

2 tablespoons butter

1½ teaspoons salt

1 egg

5 teaspoons instant yeast

3 to 3¼ cups flour

Glaze

1 egg white (lightly beaten and mixed with a teaspoon of water)

pearl sugar or other coarse sugar

Combine the hot water and saffron, and let sit for 10 minutes to soften the saffron. In a mixing bowl, beat together the saffron water, milk, sugar, butter, salt, egg, yeast, and 2 cups of the flour. Add enough of the remaining flour to make soft dough. Knead the dough for about 15 minutes by hand; then set it aside to rise till puffy (but not necessarily doubled in bulk), about 2 hours.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Punch down the dough and let it rest, covered, for 10 minutes. Divide the dough into 16 pieces and shape each piece into a ball or the traditional backwards-S shape. Place the balls fairly close together (but not touching) in a 12-inch deep-dish pizza pan or 9 x 13-inch pan. Cover and let rise for 1½ hours, or until puffy.

Glaze the buns with the beaten egg white and sprinkle them heavily with pearl sugar. Bake them in the oven at 375 degrees for 20 minutes, or until they're golden brown. (Watch them closely at the end; because of their high sugar content, they tend to brown quickly.) Serve with butter or Devon cream.

adapted from http://www.kingarthurflour.com/shop/RecipeDisplay?RID=R91

Swedish Ginger Thins

These are elegant Christmas cookies, called *pepparkakor* in Swedish. As you might guess, the originals were made with pepper, but the use of pepper has vanished over time.

Yields: 150 cookies
Prep Time: 40 minutes (chill for 2 hours)
Total time: 2 hours 50 minutes (6-minute baking time for each batch)

3 cups all-purpose flour

1½ teaspoons baking soda

1½ teaspoons cinnamon

1½ teaspoons ground ginger

1½ teaspoons ground cloves

½ cup well-chilled heavy cream

1 stick (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened

1 cup sugar

½ cup dark corn syrup

garnish: about 150 sliced almonds

In a large bowl sift together flour, baking soda, and spices. In a medium bowl beat cream with an electric mixer just until it holds stiff peaks. In another large bowl cream butter and sugar until mixture is light and fluffy. On low speed, beat in corn syrup and whipped cream, beating until cream is just combined. Add flour mixture and beat until combined well. Form dough into a disk. Wrap disk in plastic wrap and chill until firm, at least 2 hours, and up to 2 days. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Cut dough into quarters and work with one quarter at a time, keeping remaining dough covered and chilled. Using a rolling pin coated with flour, roll out dough into a ball on a floured pastry cloth, rolling dough as thin as possible (less than ⅛-inch thick and about 14 inches in diameter). Cut out cookies with assorted 2- to 3-inch cookie cutters. Carefully transfer cookies as cut to ungreased baking sheets with a metal spatula, arranging them about ½ inch apart, and top each with an almond slice. Re-roll scraps and cut out more cookies.

Bake cookies in batches in upper and lower thirds of oven, switching position of sheets halfway through baking, until cookies puff and then collapse slightly, about 6 minutes. Cool cookies on sheets for 1 minute and then transfer them with metal spatula to racks to cool completely. Keep cookies in airtight containers at room temperature one week.

adapted from Reichl, Ruth. *The Gourmet Cookbook*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004

Swedish Meatballs

Yields: 60–100 meatballs (8–10 servings)
Prep time: 20 minutes
Total time: 30–35 minutes

Meatballs

2 pounds ground meat (half beef, half pork)

2 eggs

1 cup buttermilk

½ cup all-purpose flour

1½ teaspoon salt

pepper to taste

1 medium onion, minced

¼ teaspoon dry mustard

⅛ teaspoon nutmeg

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. By hand, or on medium speed with an electric mixer, thoroughly blend the ground meat and add all other ingredients. Beat until very well mixed. Form into balls about ¾–1½ inches in diameter. Place meatballs close together (but not touching) on ungreased cookie sheets. Bake at 450 degrees for 10–15 minutes. Remove carefully.

Stir the meatballs into the sauce, then transfer them to the serving dish. Meatballs can be prepared ahead and refrigerated in covered containers for 2 to 3 days, or frozen in airtight containers for several months. You can freeze cooled meatballs spread out on a clean, cool baking sheet, then transfer them to airtight containers. Thawed or refrigerated meatballs should be heated in a single layer on an ungreased baking sheet for 10–15 minutes at 375 degrees.

Brown sauce

2 tablespoons pan fat

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 cup beef broth

½–¾ cup water (to taste)

Add the flour to the pan fat in a saucepan; mix thoroughly. Discard the rest of the fat from the cooking pan, then rinse the pan in some of the broth to loosen the bits of meat from the pan. Add the broth to the fat/flour base in the saucepan. (Tip: At this point, mixing the fat/flour mixture and the broth mixture in the blender removes all lumps thoroughly.) Heating this mixture, slowly add the water to taste. Bring to a boil. Pour sauce over meat.

Sour cream sauce

1 cup sour cream

½ cup shredded *gjetost* (a brown Swedish cheese)

Transfer the meatballs to the serving dish. Discard the fat from the cooking pan. Stir the sour cream into the pan to pick up the rest of the pan drippings and the bits of meat. Heat slightly; do not boil. Stir in the shredded cheese if desired. Pour the hot mixture over the meat.

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A book review of *Foodways and Folklore*

Savoring Folklore

by Lacey Wulf

During the Thanksgiving holiday, many tables are beautifully set with a cornucopia, overflowing with assorted fruits and vegetables. While nationally associated with thanksgiving for the plenty of our harvest, a cornucopia significantly reflects much more.

In her recent book *Foodways and Folklore*, Dr. Jacqueline Thursby of Brigham Young University discusses why we are attached to having certain foods in certain situations and what these attachments mean. She writes, "For many, foods carry elements of meaning, including memories and nostalgia. Foods laden with significance can even provide a sense of psychological well-being and harmony" (1). From Mom's homemade cookies to a favorite dish at a favorite restaurant, these foods—special or common—not only are expected at certain events but also often symbolize aspects of a culture.

Some symbolic foods seem obvious. McDonald's itself represents our nation's obsession with fast food. Milk chocolate, used in advertising, symbolizes romance with its rich smoothness. Some of the most interesting symbols Dr. Thursby discusses are common ones, consisting of apples, grain, and ginseng.

Apples

In Greek mythology, according to Dr. Thursby, the apple represents love, marriage, springtime, youth, fertility, longevity, and sexual happiness. This fruit was also thought to sustain the immortal gods. Paris is given the beautiful (and married) Helen of Troy, after selecting Aphrodite as the most beautiful Greek goddess and awarding her the golden apple of discord, thus causing the infamous Trojan War. Because the apple represents youth, love, and sexuality, it is little wonder that Aphrodite awared Paris with the beautiful Helen after receiving the apple.

In Christian tradition, the apple—sometimes a fig—brought knowledge of good and evil to Adam and Eve. Elementary school students often eat apples for lunch at school where they learn. Children also frequently give their teachers apples as gifts, symbolizing the knowledge they have gained from their teachers. Because of the symbolism of apples, we are not only able to see the deeper meaning behind a painting portraying Greek gods or Adam and Eve holding the apple, but we may also be able to see deeper meaning in our own interactions with that food.

We also justify eating apples by saying we want to preserve our youthfulness and longevity. After all, we have the phrase "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" for a reason.

Cereal Facts

- Americans buy 2.7 billion packages of breakfast cereal each year.
- 49 percent of Americans start each morning with a bowl of cereal.
- Americans consume about ten pounds or 160 bowls of cereal per person per year. But America ranks only fourth in per capita cereal consumption. Ireland ranks first, England ranks second, and Australia ranks third.

(see http://www.lavasurfer.com/bchof/hof-book.html)

Grain

"Grain has been a symbol of the continuity of life, abundance, and prosperity for thousands of years," Dr. Thursby states in her book. "Grain has been the mainstay of most of the human race" (164). Many cultures lean on the grains in bread as the staff of their life, making grain a staple crop.

In Greek mythology, Demeter, or the Roman Ceres, wears a crown made of wheat as the goddess of grain and motherly love, nourishing the Greeks into a thriving nation. Interestingly, *cereal* originates from the Latin root *Ceres*—and cereal is the most common breakfast food in America.

With the knowledge that grain symbolically refers to the continuity of life and prosperity, we are reminded that grain is essential to our diets to sustain our health and our energy.

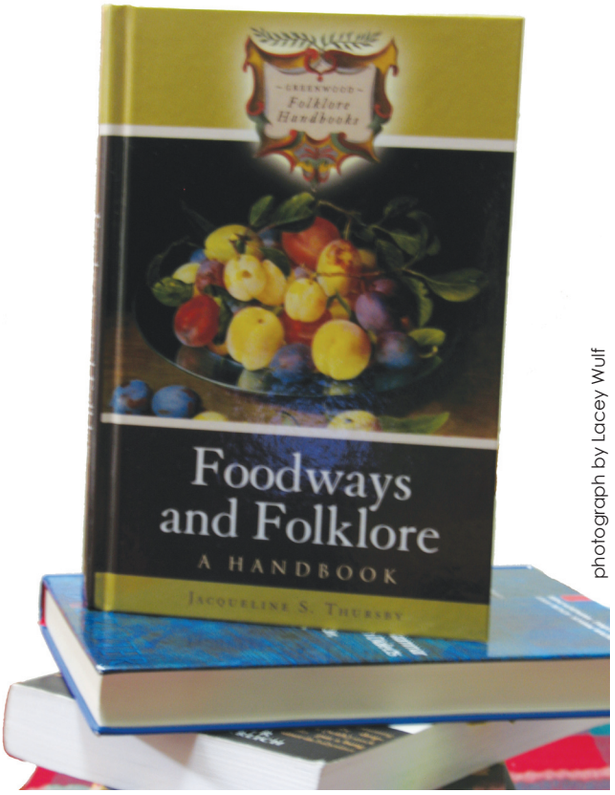
Ginseng

Often similar in shape to the human form, ginseng has been regarded as a panacea herb by many Americans since the early nineteenth century. Dr. Thursby explains, "The herb's botanical name, panax, is derived from the Greek word *pan*, which means 'all.' When combined with the Greek word *akos* (ills), it takes on a meaning of a plant that cures all illnesses" (69). Interestingly, this herb, like some other food symbols, has similar implications across cultural boundaries. In Chinese, for example, *ginseng* literally means "man plant." Also called the "root of life," ginseng "is believed to invigorate, rejuvenate, and revitalize the human body" (69). Although ginseng does not cure all ailments, as many have assumed, ginseng can lower blood sugar in diabetic patients. Perhaps this humanistic plant with its all-healing title and its significant shape reflects our desire to be able to cure everything.

With all this knowledge, the meaning of the cornucopia comes more into focus. As previously mentioned, the horn, offering easy access to an assortment of fruits and vegetables, could refer simply to the plentiful harvest at Thanksgiving. But it could also represent the sustenance and life with which the earth nourishes us every year. For these provisions, we have something to be truly grateful for.

These are just a few foods and issues discussed in Dr. Jacqueline Thursby's *Foodways and Folklore*. They illustrate that the foods we eat and enjoy might influence us subconsciously. Often we do not realize what they symbolize or what they mean to us, but we expect them in certain settings and depend on them for certain functions. Dr. Thursby's book urges us to realize that food does much more than just fuel our bodies for survival or even make eating enjoyable—it actually reflects the way we see ourselves and our culture.

Please refer to the full text of *Foodways and Folklore* or our Web site, garnishmagazine.com, to learn more about this book and additional foods and their meanings. ■



photograph by Lacey Wulf

in the kitchen with Joseph McRae

by Dianna King

In a place that calls itself Family City, USA., you don't quite expect to find a restaurant that seems like it would be more at home in a larger city like New York or San Francisco. But that's exactly what you get when you enter Pizzeria 712 in Orem, Utah, all thanks to the vision of its owners, Joseph McRae and Colton Soelburg. I met with Joseph in the warm, inviting atmosphere of Pizzeria 712 to discuss what led him to where he is now.

> There's no reason we have to truck food in from South America that we grow here. It just makes sense. It's good for the economy, it's good for local farmers, and it's good for the earth.

Garnish: Describe for me the moment you decided you wanted your own restaurant, and how it merged with the idea of sustainability.

Joseph McRae: I was fortunate to meet Colton when our paths crossed in Park City. It was the right time. We had a common goal of having a restaurant—we always felt that we wanted to have a nice restaurant in Utah Valley. Colton grew up here; I came here a long time ago with my wife. At that time, there was nothing. There weren't any restaurants at all.

Over the years the chain restaurants started seeing that there was an opportunity to come here to Orem, and they all came pretty fast. They were kind of taking care of people's needs for a while, but Colton and I felt that it was the right time, that people wanted more than that. We felt there was no reason that Utah Valley couldn't have a nice restaurant. And supporting local farmers and the whole-foods movement—we really connected as far as our goals.

Garnish: You wanted to do it here in Orem because it hadn't been done before?

McRae: [shrugging] This is our home. This is where we live.

Garnish: This is where you want to stay.

McRae: Yeah. A lot of people in the cooking industry all want to leave, saying, "I want to go to San Francisco; I want to go to New York." Well, we've come back, and we want to provide an opportunity for the people that live here to have a nice restaurant.

We didn't want to do really froufrou or really uncomfortable, snobby. We just wanted all the qualities of fine dining from the cities like using really fresh products, using local farmers, doing everything made to order, rotating foods, keeping it really fresh, really real. It's a lot of work. It's hard. But that was our training, and that's the kind of food we like—and it's worked. People love good food wherever they

go. And though people may not always understand the techniques or the style that we're doing, they know it tastes better. They just *know* it does.

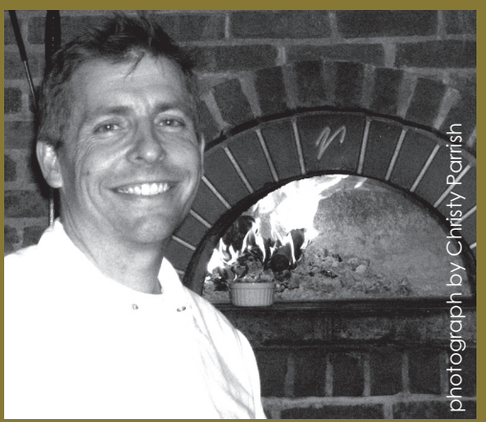
Garnish: And what about sustainability? Why is it important to you?
McRae: "Because we love Mother Earth." [Laughing.] Colton used to tease me all the time, saying that. I'd forget and put the butter boxes in the trash or something (because we recycle everything) and he would say, "Don't you love Mother Earth?" Here in Utah Valley, we feel like we're at the beginning of a wave as far as sustainability goes and as far as helping local farmers grow their food here. There's no reason we have to truck food in from South America that we grow here. It just makes sense. It's good for the economy, it's good for local farmers, and it's good for the earth.

Garnish: Let's talk about some of your goals for the restaurant. One is to take care of people?
McRae: Absolutely. One aspect of our mission statement is that we want people to have an experience eating with friends and family—the whole package, from the service to just being able to hear the music they like.

Garnish: Customers can bring in their own music?
McRae: Yeah. We do have a music committee, though; they have to approve all the music. [Smiles wryly.] But I can't get any of my songs on—I guess I'm not cool enough.

Garnish: Before you opened your restaurant, didn't you plan to impress everyone? Are you impressed with yourself?
McRae: It's not me that comes here and eats. Colton and I always say, "If you're not going to be the best, or do the best that you can, then why even bother?" It's not worth it. Life is too short.

photograph by Megan Andersen


photograph by Christy Parrish

Joseph McRae

Fresh is Best

When I arrived at Pizzeria 712 for the interview, Joseph was running a little late—he and Colton had been at the farmers' market, browsing for the best local products available, even though it means about two hours of traveling to and from Salt Lake City, which is located about 45 miles north of Orem. Why do they do it? Because fresh food tastes better, and because Joseph and Colton feel strongly about supporting local farmers as part of their vision for a more sustainable food industry.

As Joseph told me, "[The earth's resources are] not unlimited. There's no reason to be totally wasteful. Taking care of and supporting sustainable resources and keeping things going are good for our children." Joseph and Colton take some of their inspiration from Alice Waters, a pioneer of the whole-foods movement, quoting her words on their Web site (www.pizzeria712.com) and on a chalkboard in the Pizzeria 712 dining room: "When you have the best and tastiest ingredients, you can cook very simply and the food will be extraordinary because it tastes like what it is."

In fact, Joseph and Colton have plans for even fresher food for their restaurant. "We want to have our own farm someday. That's our ultimate goal," Joseph told me.

photograph by Megan Andersen

We wanted to have the beautiful paintings on the wall, the nice leather, and the custom chairs. We wanted to do it right. So as far as impressing, I guess that if people come in and they feel comfortable and they think it's nice, they enjoy the lighting, and they have an experience with their friends . . . [shrugging]

We feel like it's all about eating and enjoying food because food is such an important part of being human. But it's social, too. I think my favorite part of the restaurant is when the dining room is full and I hear a lot of laughter and talking and everybody's in their own world, but they're all engaged in this group dynamic of friendship and camaraderie.

Garnish: Is that why you have an open kitchen?
McRae: Absolutely. I've been in plenty of dungeons, and I've been withdrawn from the customer. For me, and for Colton, the open kitchen makes it that much more worthwhile to find this product, to not take any shortcuts, to go that little extra in the kitchen. And people can interact with us—that's what I really like about it. I'm a people person, and it's nice for me to go interact with everybody. You cook for people, and they really appreciate it; they want to be your friend. You cook them really good food; they really want to be your friend.

Plus, cooking is more entertaining, too. People watch the oven [the wood-burning stove]; people just watch the whole time. They really love seeing the fire, and they're amazed. That's the only stove we have; we cook everything in there. It's funny to me because it seems like as a society we spent a lot of time in the last hundred years trying to make cooking easier by doing stoves and all these other things. Now we're just back to the fire, and I think, "Wow. This is really how it's supposed to be." I mean, it cooks really great—it cooks veggies, it cooks the protein, it cooks desserts. We do everything there. And it does it really well, and I just think, "Man, fire!" They had it right. They did it that way for a couple thousand years, and then we tried to make it easy.

Garnish: I know you really care about your stove. You've likened the process of building it to the process of giving birth.
McRae: It was.

Garnish: Did you name the stove?
McRae: No, but we do talk about her though. She has to be appeased.

Garnish: So it's a she, then?
McRae: Yeah. I don't know how that came about, but she's a girl. You have to appease her, make sure she's happy. She likes a lot of wood. Some days, if she's not in a good mood, it can be tough getting the food out, getting the pizzas out. But yeah, the biggest thing of cooking is controlling heat, so she really is the heart of the whole thing. ■

my search for self

Finding My **Italian Layer**

by Tammy Messick

Before I could protest, Guido, dressed in a chef's apron and hat, grabbed my shoulders and pulled me forward for an Italian double-cheek kiss. Unprepared and awkward at fourteen, I tried to pick a side: right or left? I couldn't decide, so my lips landed in the middle. Guido laughed, as he knew it was my first trip to Italy. I was enamored by the beauty of the country, and every glance was an adventure to be discovered. I wanted to follow every road, explore every path, and turn every corner to see what beauties were ahead. Yet I felt so out of place, so foreign. I desperately wanted to blend in and to act, look, and feel Italian.

My great-grandmother, Angela Bertola, grew up in Trento, a village at the base of the Swiss Alps. When she was a young woman, she was sent to the United States as a mail-order bride. Angela left brothers and sisters behind, and their descendants still reside in this quaint town. Two of these relatives, Fabio and Antonia, brought us to Guido's restaurant.

We spent that first evening in Trento at Guido's Pizza, enjoying the most blissful meal I had ever had. Because our relatives were Guido's good friends, we were treated to as much Italian pizza as our hearts desired. I wanted to order anything truly Italian. Two young chefs tossed and caught the carefully prepared pizza dough, then spread it with sweet tomato sauce and cheeses, adding toppings such as artichokes, crumbled Parmesan, and sun-dried tomatoes. Our meal lasted over three hours. No meal I had ever eaten in my life had lasted that long. There were no waiters trying to push us out of the restaurant, and no one needed to rush off somewhere—that evening it was about the here and now.

I realized at that moment that being Italian is more than just knowing the customs of the country; it is letting my heritage fill me with a passion for the beautiful things that make me truly Italian.

On our last day in Trento, my family piled into Fabio's pickup truck. Fabio specializes in roof repair, and he wanted to show us work he had recently completed at the San Romedio chapel. The white, dramatic church sat atop a cliff, teetering on the mountainside. Inside the church was a little café where we enjoyed the most divine cup of hot chocolate. The entire cup was small enough to fit inside the palm of my hand. I closed my eyes and slowly sipped the decadent dark chocolate, thick as pudding. There, in that small café, I felt transformed. As I drank the chocolate, my Italian roots seemed to resonate through every part of my body.

I realized at that moment that being Italian is more than just knowing the customs of the country; it is letting my heritage fill me with a passion for the beautiful things that make me truly Italian. ■

finishing touch lighting

photograph by Kayla Crouch

Light up your dinner party

by Amy Jensen

When it comes to entertaining, the way food *looks* is just as important as the way food *tastes*. Poor light can make food look dull and uninviting, but well-placed light can bring brilliance to the room. While you should always have an overhead light shining on your meal, you can adorn the rest of the table—the room, even—with candlelight.

Candles will set the mood, and not necessarily a romantic one, for your dinner party. There are so many different styles of candles and ways to display them that you can create almost any mood. But no matter what atmosphere you're going for, candles will always feel warm and inviting to you and your guests. Fill a room with cheer, drama, festivity, or elegance with some wax, a wick, and a flame, and the following good advice.

Bottle It Up

Instead of using a regular candleholder, place your candles inside glass jars. Use jars of unique shapes, colors, and sizes. For a custom look, tie ribbons around the jars, or garnish the insides of the jars by tossing in a sprig of holly, some pebbles, a flower, peppermint candy, or any item that reflects the theme of your dinner party. Just remember to keep all flammable materials away from the flame.

Pair It with Water

There's something dazzling about the way a flame flickers over water, which is why floating candles never fail to impress. Add a unique twist to this classic look by using wine glasses instead of a bowl or by putting food coloring in the water. Or place a glass dish with a single floating candle in front of each place setting so that each guest can enjoy an individualized touch of elegance.

Maximize the Effect

A strategically placed mirror reflects the candlelight and adds to the brilliance of the room. Whether hanging on the wall or resting underneath a candle centerpiece, a mirror increases the delightful warmth of a candlelit room.

Beyond the Table

Complement your table setting with candles in other locations around the room. A row of tall candles lined with garland, looks charming and welcoming on the windowsill. A collection of pillar candles of varying heights looks enchanting in the fireplace. Be creative in your placement to add a unique feel to the entire room.

Keep in Mind

Make sure to use unscented candles. You don't want the candles' aroma to clash with the fragrance and flavor of your delicious meal. Also, remember that the design should enhance the dinner party, not detract from it. Don't place candles at eye level where they will obstruct the guests' view. Finally, enjoy the warm ambiance that you have created. It will make you, your guests, and your party glow. ■

Elegant, Appetizing, & Unique

The Sophisticated Side of Holiday Party Tradition

by Megan Andersen & Francesca Nishimoto
photography by Brittany Andersen

Elegant parties are in season all year round: to honor achievements, to network with colleagues, to celebrate milestones. However, these parties are not usually given to celebrate the holidays, though it is possible to throw an elegant holiday party. We did—and we enjoyed time with family and friends in an original and sophisticated way.

In searching for holiday party ideas, we encountered only popcorn balls, "Jingle Bells," and Santa Claus hats—the somewhat tacky, overused ideas employed at the usual office and neighborhood parties. Not finding the party ideas we were hoping for, we decided to create our own elegant holiday-themed party that turned out to be the highlight of our guests' holiday season.

Decorating for Your Party

To maintain the sophisticated setting, we avoided the bright Christmas colors of peppermint red and elf green. Instead, we used maroon and forest green because these darker tones reflect the elegance of an evening party. We accented these colors with gold trimmings to add a touch of sparkle.

For a soft glow to match the subdued shades, we hung white holiday lights and placed candles around the room (see "Finishing Touch," page 15, for more information on using candles).

The main focus of the party was the food table: the delightful, warm smells and the delicate, artful presentation of each dish. To adorn the food table, we scattered small pine branches, pinecones, and cinnamon sticks. We served the food on crystal platters, in crystal bowls, and on white dinnerware to present it in a traditional yet beautiful way.

We avoided letting other holiday decorations, such as a Christmas tree, divert attention from the exquisite feast. Rather, we complemented the refined food with equally refined decorations hung about the room. Glittery glass ball ornaments were perfect because they are available in various colors, sizes, and designs. And dainty little bells twinkled nicely in the white lights strung across the windows.

For a more generic party theme, decorate in winter hues: try different shades of blue and white, with silver accents. Or replace the ornament-and-bell theme with snowflakes.

Food Presentation

For our holiday party, we put together a fairly simple menu. We wanted a sophisticated, unique spread that included touches of traditional holiday foods. We served Spiced Apple Cider, Shrimp & Artichoke Dip with baguette slices, Flaky Spinach Tarts, Triple Chocolate Gingerbread Cake with Cinnamon-and-Spice Whipped Cream, and homemade Butter Mints and Caramels. (See recipes below.)

Just as important as a carefully selected menu is the presentation of your food. The food presentation can change your party from just another holiday party to a tasteful, refined holiday experience. As with the other aspects of our party, we strove to make the presentation of our food elegant, appetizing, and unique.

Spiced Apple Cider

Serving this beverage posed a little bit of a challenge for us. We wanted to combine the elegance of a champagne glass with the practicality of a sturdy mug. We didn't want our guests leaving with fingers burned from the heat of the cider through the thin glass of stemware, but our motley collection of mugs would have been an embarrassment. The solution: beautifully delicate glass mugs. The rich color of the cider was clearly visible through the glass, but our guests had a handle to hold on to. For an added garnish to your cider, place a cinnamon stick inside each filled mug.

Serves: 8
Prep time: 5 minutes
Total time: 30–60 minutes

2 quarts sweet apple cider

1 teaspoon whole cloves

1 teaspoon whole allspice

2 (3-inch) cinnamon sticks

⅓ cup lightly packed brown sugar

dash of salt

Bring ingredients to a boil in a large kettle. Simmer for 30 to 60 minutes. Remove spices. Serve hot in mugs.

adapted from www.Cooks.com

Shrimp & Artichoke Dip

Because of the way this dish is constructed, the bakeware used to cook the dip is the same bakeware the dip is served in. We love Pyrex for its usability and durability, but it lacks style for refined gatherings. We baked our dip in an elegant white ceramic dish. We then found a platter that mirrored the shape of the dish and clustered the baguette slices around the dish instead of placing them in a basket to the side.

Serves: 10
Prep time: 30 minutes
Total time: 60 minutes

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

2 cups half-and-half

¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon garlic powder

dash of salt

dash of red pepper

2 egg yolks, lightly beaten

1 (13¾-ounce) can artichoke hearts, drained and chopped

1 pound shrimp, cleaned, peeled, and deveined

¼ pound fresh mushrooms, chopped and sautéed

¾ cup grated Cheddar and Monterey Jack cheese

paprika to taste

baguette slices, or other items of your choice for dipping

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Melt butter in saucepan over medium heat. Blend in flour to make a roux. Add half-and-half all at once, stirring constantly until thickened and smooth. Add Parmesan cheese, Worcestershire sauce, garlic powder, and salt and pepper. Temper egg yolks with 2 tablespoons of hot mixture and add back to the cheese sauce. Set aside. Mix artichoke hearts, shrimp, and mushrooms together. Put in baking dish and pour sauce over top. Sprinkle top with grated cheese and paprika. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes. Serve with baguette slices.

adapted from www.foodnetwork.com

Flaky Spinach Tarts

These flaky tarts belong at any elegant party. The delicate pastry and the crimped edges give them an air of sophistication that demands no more presentation than an attractive serving platter. But every dish can be enhanced with the appropriate garnish. To garnish our spinach tarts, we drew from our red and green holiday theme. We picked a lovely glass platter and layered the bottom of it with red lettuce. We stacked the spinach tarts on top, allowing some of the lettuce (both green and red pieces) to poke out around the edges. We then brought in more of the red and green colors by nesting cherry tomatoes between and around the tarts.

Serves: 8
Prep time: 30 minutes
Total time: 60 minutes

¼ cup butter

¼ cup flour

1 cup milk

1 16-ounce bag frozen, chopped spinach

salt, pepper, and nutmeg to taste

¼ cup finely shredded Swiss cheese

⅛ teaspoon dry mustard

1 (8-count) can large flaky biscuits

4 tablespoons butter, melted

1 cup prepared spaghetti sauce, optional

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Melt butter in the top of a double boiler over low direct heat. Blend in flour and cook until mixture is smooth and bubbly. Gradually add milk and cook until thickened, stirring constantly. Add frozen spinach. Cover and cook over boiling water for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Combine creamed spinach, Swiss cheese, and dry mustard in a medium bowl and mix well.

For the tart pastry, separate each of the biscuits into halves. Roll each biscuit half into a 4-inch circle on a lightly floured surface. Spoon 2 tablespoons of spinach mixture in the center of half the tart pastries. With a fork, prick the center of each remaining half and place on top of the filled pastries. Seal pastry edges with water and crimp with fork. Arrange tarts on a baking sheet. Brush with melted butter. Bake tarts until golden, about 10 to 12 minutes. Serve with hot prepared spaghetti sauce, if desired.

adapted from Grandma's Kitchen: Treasured Family Recipes

Triple Chocolate Gingerbread Cake

Because of the rich, chocolaty color and delicious flavor of this cake, we decided not to frost it. But even without frosting, a cake can be garnished beautifully. We served each slice with a dollop of Cinnamon-and-Spice Whipped Cream. The

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flavor of the whipped cream perfectly complemented the chocolate gingerbread flavor of the cake. We also sprinkled the cake with powdered sugar and garnished it with sprigs of pine.

Serves: 16
Prep time: 10 minutes
Total time: 60 minutes

1 package chocolate cake mix, any variety

1 package (4-serving size) chocolate flavor instant pudding and pie filling mix

4 eggs

1 tablespoon ground ginger

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon ground allspice

½ cup sour cream

½ cup vegetable oil

½ cup molasses

½ cup water

1 cup mini chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray 10-cup Bundt pan with nonstick cooking spray, or coat with flour.

Beat all ingredients except chocolate chips in large bowl with electric mixer on low speed, until just moistened, scraping sides of bowl frequently. Beat on medium speed 2 minutes, or until well blended. Stir in chocolate chips. Pour into prepared pan.

Bake at 350 degrees for about 50 minutes, or until cake pulls away from side of the pan and cake springs back when touched lightly. Cool on rack for 15 minutes. Invert cake onto cooling rack and remove pan. If cake sticks to pan, loosen it from side of pan with long skewer or knife. Cool completely before serving.

adapted from www.Mccormick.com

Cinnamon-and-Spice Whipped Cream

Serves: 8
Prep time: 10 minutes
Total time: 20 minutes

1 cup whipping cream

2 tablespoons brown sugar

½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

dash of nutmeg, ground or freshly grated

In medium-sized bowl, beat cream for 3 to 4 minutes, until it begins to form soft peaks. Gradually add sugar, being careful not to overbeat. Fold in vanilla, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Note: For best results, use chilled bowl and beaters.

Butter Mints and Caramels

Homemade candies are a large part of the December holiday season. We picked a couple of simple yet delicious candies to add an elegant complement to our party and found unique ways to present them to our guests. First, we chose Butter Mints. These treats are easy to make, and they

give your guests something to snack on if they're not hungry enough for the other food. We colored our Butter Mints in pastel green to keep with the theme of the party. To add that extra garnish to our Butter Mints, we served them in delicate white chocolate cups.

Our second candy choice was homemade caramels. Instead of leaving these treats out on the table for our guests, we used them as party favors so our guests could take them home and share them with others. Instead of wrapping bundles of caramels up in holiday-printed cellophane or colored tissue paper, we created simple paper cones using cardstock and ribbons.

Butter Mints

Yields: 90 mints
Total time: 1½ hours

1 cup water

½ cup butter

2 cups sugar

1 teaspoon mint extract

food coloring

In a heavy 3-quart saucepan, heat water and butter until butter is melted. Add sugar and stir with wooden spoon until dissolved. Cover and bring to boil. Remove lid and wipe sides of pan with a brush to remove any sugar crystals. Continue cooking until syrup reaches 260 degrees. Pour onto cold buttered slab. Do not scrape pan. Sprinkle with mint extract and 2 or 3 drops of desired food coloring, but do not stir in. When cool enough to handle, pull like taffy until candy is firm but elastic and loses its gloss. Pull out to a ½-inch rope; cut into ½-inch pieces. Store mints in a covered container. The flavor of the candy will mellow in 12 to 24 hours.

adapted from *Lion House Christmas*

White Chocolate Cups

Yields: 6 cups
Prep time: 5 minutes
Total time: 20 minutes

2 squares white baking chocolate

Line cups of mini-muffin tin with pieces of foil; place tin in freezer to chill foil. Microwave white baking chocolate squares in small microwaveable bowl on medium for 1½ minutes; stir until chocolate is completely melted. Drizzle chocolate with a spoon onto bottoms and up sides of prepared cups. Freeze for 15 minutes. Carefully remove cups from pan; gently peel

off and discard foil. (This recipe also works well with semi-sweet chocolate.)

Caramels

Yields: 30–40 caramels
Total time: 1½ hours

1 quart corn syrup

4 cups sugar

1 cup butter (2 cubes)

2 cans evaporated milk

1 pint whipped cream

1 tablespoon vanilla

Mix corn syrup and sugar together in a large pot; bring to a hard boil. Add the butter 1 cube at a time, waiting until completely melted and mixed before adding the next cube. Add the milk and whipped cream alternately in 5 parts each. Cook to 240 degrees, stirring frequently. Mixture should boil constantly without boiling over. Add vanilla, stirring constantly. Pour into buttered cookie sheet; do not scrape pan. Let stand for several hours. Remove candy from pan and cut into 1 x ½-inch rectangles. Wrap in pieces of waxed paper.

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Maestro's: Smooth European Indulgence

by Krista Landon
photography by the author

Provo's Center Street may not be the first place you'd look for a fresh taste of elegant European charm, but Maestro's Gelato Café lends the city a special hint of international gourmet flavor. Gelato is a popular Italian ice cream treat that moves a step beyond ordinary ice cream, offering rich, concentrated flavor that authentically replicates the distinct flavors indicated by the designated gelato titles. Even standard gelato flavors like hazelnut, amaretto, pistachio, melon, berry, or tiramisu set this European dessert apart from the American ice cream tradition.

Taste and texture alone are not the only attractions of gelato. The creamy delicacy is healthier than standard American ice cream because it uses less cream, butter, and fat. It is much denser than other ice creams because less air is mixed in. Reducing the air content not only makes the texture smoother, but it also offers more direct access to the delectable taste of the ingredients. The gelati recipes used at Maestro's rely heavily on naturally flavorful ingredients, rather than artificial flavors and other additives. The fruit-based flavors at Maestro's are more accurately called *sorbettos*, which use a water and juice foundation and contain no milk, dairy products, or fat.

Maestro's opened just over a year ago and is the result of owner Alex Stefanciw's desire to create a restaurant with the cozy atmosphere of a café. Stefanciw and his wife wanted to bring a touch of old European class to historic downtown Provo, and they accomplished their goal by combining classic European sophistication with

Gelato usually contains less than 55% air, making it denser and more flavorful than most American ice cream.

Sorbettos are fruit-flavored ice concoctions made without dairy ingredients, similar to American sherbets.

Gelato melts faster than other ice creams, since the ingredients are not homogenized.

While gelato has less air whipped into it than American ice cream, *sorbettos* are especially flavorful because there is almost no air mixed into them.

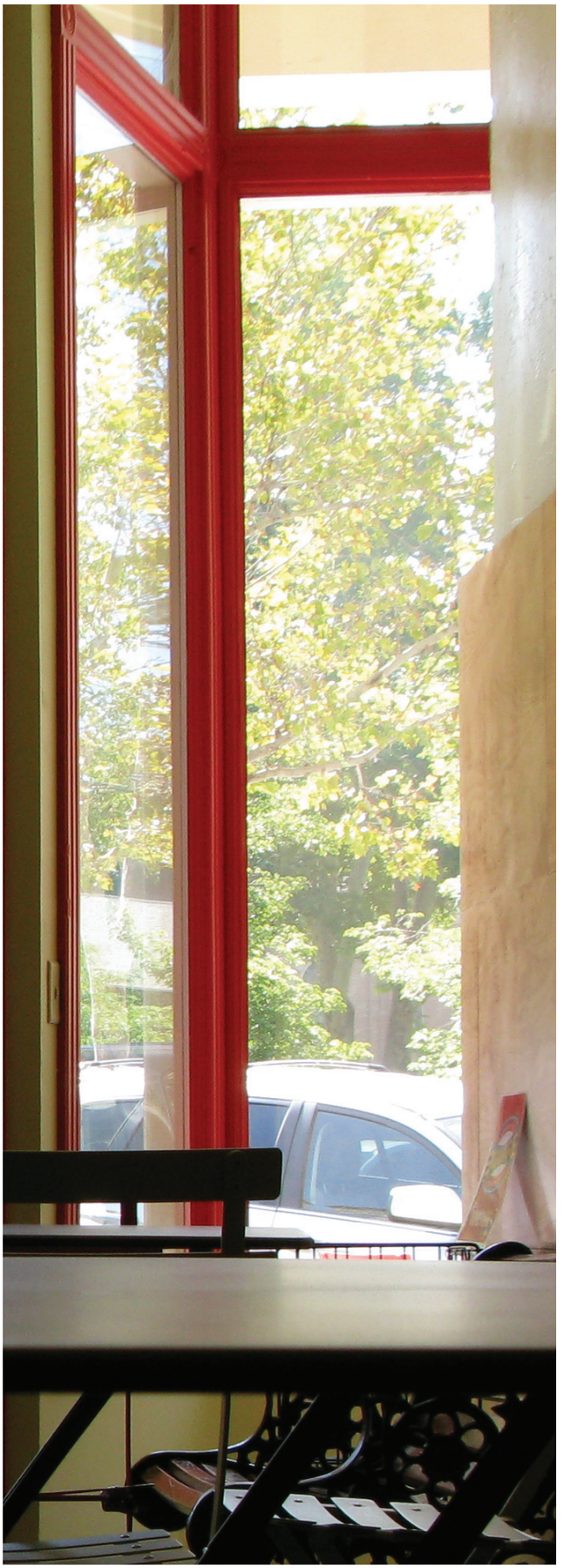
Maestro's lends a special hint of international gourmet flavor.

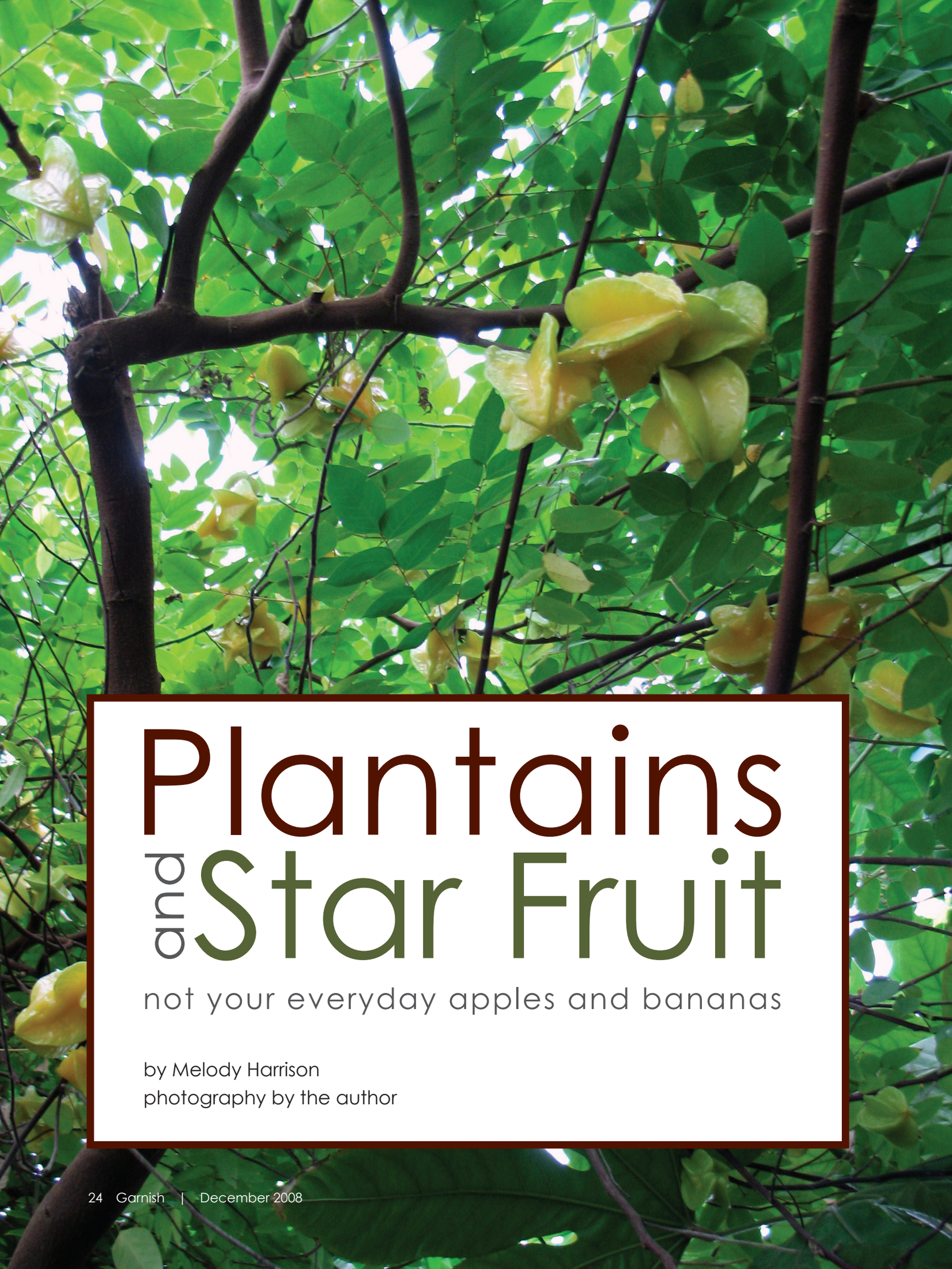
modern style. Although the café has some outdoor seating, the cobblestone floor of the indoor dining area also creates the sensation of dining *alfresco*—an effect that is especially pleasant during the harsher seasons of Utah's climate.

Although the gelateria continues to be the focus of the café, Maestro's also offers a variety of crêpes, with toppings such as Nutella, strawberries, whipped cream, lemon, sugar, bananas, powdered sugar, and cinnamon. To take the sting from winter's chill, Maestro's also sells a rich, creamy "sipping chocolate" with the velvety smooth texture of melted chocolate. In the future, Stefanciw also hopes to expand the scope of his little café by including European-style pastries and other baked goods on the menu.

Maestro's maintains a selection of about twenty regular gelato flavors, which are supplemented by specialty flavors that rotate each month. Each flavor is produced daily in the café, using fresh ingredients as well as fine imported ingredients, like chocolates from Italy. Patrons are welcome to make flavor requests, and while there's no guarantee, a particular flavor may be added to the menu if enough requests are made. The café's clientele includes couples, families, and singles, with a comfortable mix of old and young that is indicative of Maestro's universal appeal. At $3.00 for the first scoop and another dollar for each additional scoop, the prices for Maestro's gelato are steep in comparison to other ice cream, but both regular and occasional patrons of the café agree: it's worth it. As one patron expresses it, "How can you count the cost when otherwise you'd have to travel to Europe to indulge your fondness for the sweet side of European gourmet taste?" ■

Maestro's Gelato Café
22 West Center Street
Provo, Utah
(801) 691–5550
Hours: Monday–Thursday, 11a.m.–11p.m.
Friday–Saturday, 11a.m.–12 p.m.
Prices: $3.00–$8.00





Plantains and Star Fruit

not your everyday apples and bananas

by Melody Harrison
photography by the author

At about six o'clock one Christmas morning, I eagerly emptied my stocking, expecting the lump at the bottom of the red sock to be the traditional Christmas orange. Instead my enthusiastic fingers pulled out a smooth-skinned, oblong . . . something.

"What is it?" I asked my parents, who were grinning with delight at my discovery.

"It's a mango." My dad removed the foreign-looking fruit from my hand. "We're going to have fruit for breakfast this morning."

My sister was examining three furry egg-shaped fruits (kiwis), and my brother had what I recognized to be a coconut.

My mom stood in the kitchen with her knife hovering over the mango. "I hope it's ripe," she said. "The store clerk was a little vague about how to tell. I know that there is a pit inside, but how do you cut around it?" She looked puzzled at this minor dilemma.

Since that first fruit-filled Christmas, my family has tried new and exotic fruits every Christmas morning. With each unfamiliar fruit, the same questions arise: How do you cut it open? Is it ripe? How do you eat it? In this world of expanding tastes, fruits from around the world are becoming more available to us in local grocery stores. Let's find out more about two exotic, versatile, and delicious fruits.

Plantains

Commonly recognized as being the less-sweet twin of the banana, the plantain is in fact a multitalented fruit. A plantain can be used in all three of its stages of ripeness. However, plantains are not eaten raw because of their unsavory texture and flavor when uncooked.

Expand tastes and start a new tradition

Using exotic fruit as stocking stuffers keeps your kids guessing, helps them learn about new foods and places, and expands their tastes beyond the sugary sweets that are traditionally eaten during the holidays. The following are some great fruits to start with:

- Kiwi
- Pineapple
- Coconut
- Mango
- Papaya
- Star fruit
- Plantain
- Pomegranate

When green, the plantain tastes best if treated like a starchy vegetable, something akin to a potato. It can be baked, fried, sautéed, boiled, and mashed. You will never run out of cooking possibilities with this fruit.

A yellow skin indicates a semi-firm, sweeter form of the fruit. At this stage, you can use the fruit as if it were green, but its sweeter flavor also lends itself to desserts, such as bread pudding.

Once black, this fruit is at its sweetest and is frequently used as if it were a banana in the sense that the fruit tastes fantastic as a cooked dessert, such as Baked Cinnamon-and-Honey Plantains. (See the recipe on page 28.)

To prepare the plantain for baking, do not snap off the top of the peel as with a banana; instead, use a knife to cut

Looking for a creative centerpiece?

Wanting to spice up a Christmas fruit platter? Star fruit can easily be transformed into a charming Christmas tree.

Cut the fruit crosswise to get the star shape. Then stack the fruit in an alternating pattern so that the arms are just off from one another. Stack the fruit so that the layers gradually become smaller and smaller like a real pine tree.

Use the smallest star shape for the star on top. Insert a toothpick between two of the arms of the smallest star shape, leaving about half of the toothpick exposed. Then poke the smallest star shape into the top of the stack so that the star shape is standing upright. Place the star fruit tree in the center of a fruit platter to add a festive feel.

For your health

While the star fruit is an amazing fruit, kidney patients should avoid eating it. The oxalic acid present in the fruit can induce hiccups, vomiting, and nausea, and might even be fatal.

Those who are taking certain types of medicines containing atorvastatin—found in medications such as Lipitor—should also avoid eating the fruit; the juice has been known to interact with that particular ingredient with the potential to cause heart failure.

off the ends. Then slice the outer skin lengthwise from top to bottom. Finally, pull the peel away from the fruit.

A plantain should be stored at room temperature, and it can last approximately two weeks before it goes bad. If you wish to make plantains a regular part of your diet, a good practice is to buy several green plantains. As the fruit ripens you can use different recipes and preparation styles to add variety to your diet.

You could sauté a green plantain for a side dish at the beginning of the week, fry a yellow plantain for a tasty treat over the weekend, and bake a black plantain for a delectable dessert after two weeks have passed.

Plantains not only have numerous ways they can be prepared, they are also very nutritious. Like their banana counterparts, they are a good source of potassium, fiber, and vitamins A and C. They are also an excellent source of carbohydrates for that extra energy lift. But be prepared to accept the caloric consequences. For example, frying a plantain can add unneeded calories to the already substantial two-hundred-calorie punch packed in half of a plain plantain.

Star Fruit (Carambola)

Though this fruit is sometimes called by two names, it is most commonly referred to as star fruit, a name that comes, of course, from its five-pointed shape. The fruit has an edible, but somewhat bitter, thin skin. In general, a golden-yellow skin is a good indication of a ripe star fruit. You can also tell if this fruit is ripe if the edges along each point of the star are slightly brown and shriveled.

Though this fruit was originally grown in Asian regions, it is now farmed in the warmer areas of the United States as well, making it much more accessible. However, it is most likely to be available in stores between July and February.

There are two types of star fruit, one much tarter than the other. To visually distinguish between the two varieties, look for thicker, fleshier edges if you prefer the sweeter flavor and thinner edges for the tarter flavor.

Similar to the plantain, the star fruit has different uses according to its different flavors. The tarter variety tends to be more popular for decorative purposes. Its thinner arms give it a sharper star shape and can make an attractive addition to any fruit display. The sweeter version tastes and looks great in fruit salads. Star fruit also make an excellent addition to exotic fruit smoothies.

A bonus feature of this attractive fruit and its varieties is that they are naturally low in fat and a good source of vitamin C.

Storing this fruit is easy. If you want your star fruit to ripen, store it at room temperature for a few days until the skin is yellow and there is brown on the tips. If it is already ripe, place it in the refrigerator to help keep it fresh. On average, a ripe star fruit will last a little less than a week if kept in the refrigerator.

Because the skin is edible, be sure to thoroughly wash the fruit before serving. Then cut the fruit crosswise to retain the star shape. Remove the seeds before eating the fruit; they tend to hide toward the center of the fruit. If you are using the star fruit in a fruit drink, be sure to remove the skin as well as the seeds.

Including more exotic fruits in your diet and even in your holiday traditions adds variety and excitement to the regular, humdrum flavors you might be used to—beyond the everyday apples, bananas, and oranges. With so many new fruits to explore, healthy eating can become a lot easier and more enjoyable. ■

To learn about more fruits and recipes, visit our Web site: garnishmagazine.com

fruit pizza

sautéed plantains

Fruit Pizza

Yields: Two small pizzas (16 servings)
Prep time: about 30 minutes
Total time: 60–70 minutes

Sugar Cookie Dough

Prep time: 15–20 minutes
Cooking time: 10 minutes

4½ cups sifted flour

½ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon baking soda

½ cup shortening

½ cup margarine

1½ cup sugar

3 eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Sift together the flour, salt, and baking soda and set aside. In a separate bowl, combine shortening, margarine, sugar, eggs, and vanilla until creamy. Add to dry ingredients and mix until it forms a doughy consistency. Flatten onto small- to medium-sized pizza pans. Bake at 350 for 10–12 minutes. Allow to cool before spreading on the cream topping.

Cream Frosting

Total Time: 10 minutes

6–8 ounces cream cheese

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup powdered sugar

4 cups whipped cream

fruit of your choice

Combine cream cheese, vanilla, powdered sugar, and whipped cream and mix until creamy.

Choose any fruit of your liking. The combination of strawberries, kiwis, and star fruits could be combined to give the pizza a festive feel. Remove star fruit seeds before placing the fruit onto the pizza. Slice the other fruits and arrange them on the pizza in a decorative pattern.

Sautéed Plantains

Serves: 3–6
Prep time: 15–20 minutes
Total time: 40 minutes

1–2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons butter or margarine

¼ cup onion, diced

½–1 cup celery, chopped

½–1 cup carrot, chopped

½–1 cup red or green pepper, sliced

1 large yellow plantain, sliced into disks

1 teaspoon lemon pepper or to taste

1 teaspoon pepper or to taste

Put frying pan on medium heat. Coat saucepan with olive oil and butter. Add diced onions. Cook until onions turn opaque, and then add chopped carrots and celery. Stir and cover to keep in the moisture. When carrots are slightly browned, add sliced peppers and plantains. Add lemon pepper and pepper. Stir and cover to maintain moisture if desired. Cook plantains until golden brown; cooking time may be about 20 minutes total.

Baked Cinnamon-and-Honey Plantains

Serves: 2
Prep time: 10–15 minutes
Total time: 35 minutes

1 very ripe plantain (black)

12–16 whole cloves

2 tablespoons butter or margarine

1 teaspoon cinnamon or to taste

1 teaspoon sugar or honey (if the plantain is more yellow than black, add to sweeten)

shredded coconut

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut plantain in half, lengthwise, and remove from peel. Place 6 to 8 cloves in each half. Coat each half with butter or margarine. Sprinkle cinnamon over the top, and add sugar or honey if desired. Finally, sprinkle on a little coconut. Gently wrap in tinfoil in order to retain moisture. If desired, spray tinfoil with cooking spray to ease the removal of the plantain once cooked. Cook plantains for 20 minutes or until they become golden. Remove the cloves before eating. Serve with a topping of whipped cream or ice cream.

Pineapple and Star Fruit Smoothie

Serves: 2–3
Total Time: 20–25 minutes

2–3 rings of pineapple, chopped

½–1 cup orange juice

1 star fruit, seeds and peel removed

1 tablespoon sugar or to taste

½ cup of plain yogurt (optional)

shredded coconut (optional)

Blend the pineapple, orange juice, and star fruit until liquefied. Strain any pulp as desired before adding the sugar and the yogurt if you wish to thicken the drink. Blend once more until smooth. Place in refrigerator to chill. Re-stir if contents have separated. Place a piece of the star fruit on the smoothie glass for visual appeal. Make a small cut between two of the arms to the center and place it on the lip of the glass. Sprinkle coconut over the smoothie to top it off.

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pass the salt.

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Hazelnuts

a new look at an old nut

by Kristin Lowe

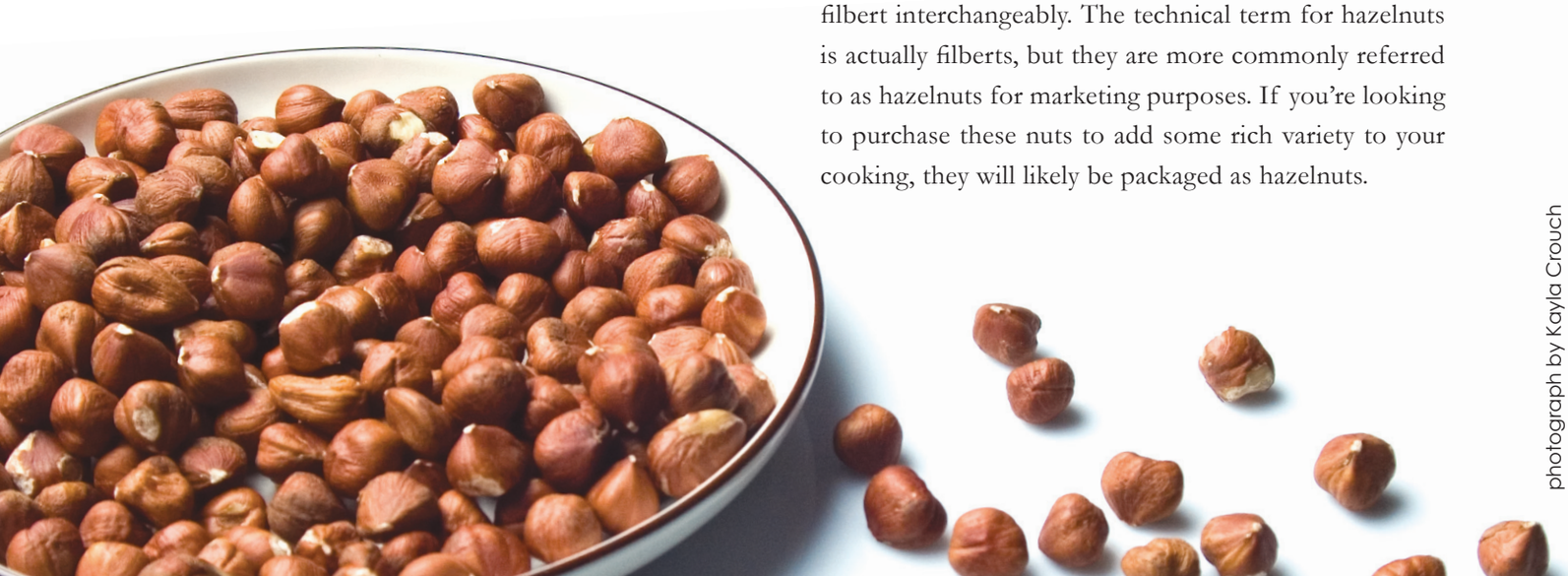
This month, *Garnish* looks at the unique background of hazelnuts and explores the exciting ways in which hazelnuts can enhance recipes with their rich and crunchy taste.

Oregon is the number-one producer of hazelnuts in the United States and the fourth-largest producer in the world. Harry Logerstedt, a hazelnut farmer in Oregon, has devoted a great deal of his life to the study and production of these delicious and versatile nuts.

After earning a PhD in plant physiology, Dr. Logerstedt spent the majority of his career working with hazelnuts as a professor in the Department of Agriculture at Oregon State University. He started growing them on his farm, the Peach Place, in the Willamette Valley as a retirement project in 1986. His wealth of knowledge about these nuts is a result of both his academic background and his farming experience.

What makes Oregon, and more specifically the Willamette Valley, such a great place to grow hazelnuts? Dr. Logerstedt says that in the Willamette Valley, the proximity of the Pacific Ocean ensures moderate summer and winter temperatures, a perfect combination for producing hazelnuts. These nuts have an unusual growth period that requires moderate temperatures throughout the winter and summer. Hazelnut trees bloom in December and pollinate in early January—a time frame that would be impossible in a colder winter climate. The blossoms are fertilized in the latter part of June and are harvested beginning in September.

Now that Dr. Logerstedt is retired, he utilizes both the favorable Oregon climate and his academic knowledge to produce hazelnuts on his farm and often spends his fall afternoons raking them up off the ground—hazelnuts fall from the trees when they are ready to be harvested. Dr. Logerstedt uses the terms hazelnut and filbert interchangeably. The technical term for hazelnuts is actually filberts, but they are more commonly referred to as hazelnuts for marketing purposes. If you're looking to purchase these nuts to add some rich variety to your cooking, they will likely be packaged as hazelnuts.



photograph by Kayla Crouch

If you are lucky enough to live in the Willamette Valley, you might be able to buy fresh hazelnuts straight from the farm. Dr. Logerstedt sells the majority of his hazelnuts directly to the public through his local farmers' market. For those who live outside of the Pacific Northwest, hazelnuts can be purchased raw or roasted and can be found at most whole-foods stores and some grocery stores. Look for them in the bulk bins near other mixed nuts.

With their rich, nutty flavor, hazelnuts can do more than just put a new spin on old recipes. They have a variety of nutritional benefits, including being a great source of vitamin E, protein, and fiber. Additionally, hazelnuts are one of the highest nut sources of antioxidants and have one of the lowest percentages of saturated fat. Whether raw or roasted, hazelnuts can add a fine touch to a variety of recipes.

Recently, hazelnuts have become a popular ingredient for cooking because of their elegance, nutritional benefits, and rich, crunchy taste that provides a refreshing alternative to more common nuts like peanuts and walnuts. Hazelnuts can be added to a variety of traditional snacks. Think outside the box the next time you are preparing your favorite treat. ■

Roasted Hazelnuts

The key to roasting hazelnuts at home is a low temperature and a longer roasting time. Consider the temperature and cooking times listed below as suggestions.

Preheat oven to 275 degrees.

Bake shelled hazelnuts for 20 to 30 minutes.

Remove the hazelnuts from the oven, pour them into a bowl, cover them with a dishcloth, and let them cool for 4 to 5 minutes.

Rub the hazelnuts vigorously in a clean towel until the skin is removed.

10 Tips
for using hazelnuts

1. Coat whole roasted hazelnuts with natural spices and seasonings for a delicious, healthy snack.

2. Combine whole roasted hazelnuts with antioxidant-rich dried fruits and dark chocolate for a tasty snack mix.

3. Add chopped, ground, or sliced hazelnuts to breads, cakes, muffins, or cookies for added texture, crunch, and rich, nutty flavor.

4. Garnish baked goods and confections with chopped, sliced, or streuseled hazelnuts for an attractive finish.

5. Sprinkle hazelnuts over salads and vegetables for crunchy texture, nutty flavor, and visual appeal.

6. Stuff ravioli pasta with finely chopped hazelnuts, cheese, and seasonings for a twist on traditional fillings.

7. Create pesto and romesco sauces using chopped hazelnuts for rich Mediterranean-inspired flavors.

8. Coat meat, fish, and poultry with chopped hazelnuts, a gluten-free alternative to flour-based coatings.

9. Add hazelnuts to cereals and snack bars for added texture, flavor, and nutrition.

10. Substitute hazelnuts for other nuts, like peanuts or walnuts, to add a new taste to an old recipe.

courtesy of www.hazelnutcouncil.org

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Plump Pumpkins and Pretty Poinsettias

THE HOLIDAY SEASON HAS COMMENCED: the trees have shed all their leaves, and their branches sag under the weight of snow; the night arrives early and cold; the world sparkles with bright lights and colorful adornments. And most important, family and friends come to town to visit.

But perhaps you or your guests are busy in the evenings. Maybe you are tired of sending out the standard dinner invitation. Or you may want to prepare a lighter meal or eat earlier in the day. Whatever your unique situation, don't let it chill your holiday warmth, because this month's meal works well in any circumstance.

Delight in the company of your loved ones with a wintry lunch based on a holiday favorite: pumpkins. For the main dish, prepare Chicken with Pumpkin and Zucchini. Serve Rice-stuffed Mini Pumpkins as an elegant side. And finish the meal with warm Cream Cheese Pumpkin Muffins. (See recipes on pages 34–35.) Decorate with poinsettias to enhance the holiday mood. Then enjoy your time with friends and family. ■

by Francesca Nishimoto

Decorations

Use nature's beauty to reflect the elegant dining atmosphere with poinsettias. Their rich red color adds brightness to an otherwise cold winter, creating a classy touch appropriate for daytime or evening.

- Place poinsettias around the dining area or in the center of the table.
- If you live in a warmer area where you can eat outside, hang poinsettias from the patio roof.
- Float the flowers in a bowl of water for a beautiful centerpiece.
- Use reds and golds in dinnerware and other decorations.
- Buy a poinsettia-patterned tablecloth.

photograph by Justin Nishimoto

Chicken with Pumpkin and Zucchini

Serves: 4
Prep time: 20 minutes
Total time: 50 minutes

2½–3 pounds of chicken breast

½ cup onion, finely chopped

2 cloves garlic, minced

2 medium red potatoes, unpeeled and cut in 1-inch cubes

2 cups pumpkin (or winter squash), peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

¾ cup reduced-sodium chicken broth

1 teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon pepper

2 medium zucchini, sliced

lemon wedges

Spray an unheated 12-inch skillet with nonstick cooking spray and preheat over medium heat. Add the chicken and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, or until lightly brown. Add onion and garlic during the last 5 minutes of cooking and then add the potatoes and pumpkin (or winter squash).

Combine broth, rosemary, salt, and pepper and pour over chicken and vegetables. Bring mixture to a boil and reduce heat; cover and simmer for 25 minutes.

Add zucchini and cook for 5 more minutes, until vegetables are tender and chicken is no longer pink. Use a slotted spoon to serve, and top the chicken with lemon wedges.

Garnish idea: Slice the zucchini with a crinkle cutter.

Decoration idea: Serve the dish on a flower-engraved crystal platter.

Cream Cheese Pumpkin Muffins

Yields: 2 dozen
Prep time: 20 minutes
Total time: 20 minutes

Filling

1 8-ounce package of cream cheese, softened

1 egg

1 tablespoon sugar

Muffin

2¼ cups all-purpose flour

3 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice

1 teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

2 eggs, lightly beaten

2 cups sugar

1 cup canned pumpkin

½ cup canola oil

To make the filling: In a small mixing bowl, beat the egg, cream cheese, and sugar until smooth.

To make the muffins: In a large bowl, combine the flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda, and salt. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs, sugar, pumpkin, and oil. Stir into dry ingredients just until moistened.

Divide half the batter among 24 greased or paper-lined muffin cups. Drop filling by the teaspoon over the batter in each muffin cup. Top with remaining batter.

Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 22 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool for 5 minutes before removing from pans to wire racks.

Garnish idea: Place a pecan half on the top of each muffin before baking, or frost muffins with cream cheese frosting and then add pecan halves.

Decoration idea: Arrange the pecan halves in the form of a poinsettia.

Rice-stuffed Mini Pumpkins

Serves: 4
Prep time: 10 minutes
Total time: about 20 minutes

4 mini pumpkins

2 cups prepared brown or wild rice

Prepare rice according to package instructions. Cut off the tops of the pumpkins and remove the seeds. Stuff pumpkins with rice.

Garnish idea: Top with parsley, almond slices, or shredded carrot. Or replace the top as a decorative cover.

Decoration idea: When cutting off the pumpkin tops, carve in the shape of a poinsettia.

Letters to the Editor

Dear *Garnish*,

I absolutely adored the April 2008 issue of *Garnish*. There are so many wonderful recipes and helpful hints. But I especially want to thank Kaitlyn Tolman for her article "In the Kitchen." It was a story that touched me on a personal level. I can really identify with her love for baking. While I was reading her story, I realized my kitchen story is not very different from hers. I just love that she brings to life the therapeutic rhythms of the kitchen. She uses baking as a pathway to self-realization, and I use baking as a pathway to de-stress and serve people around me. Our fast-food, high-tech world could use a little more home-baked remedy. Thank you for sharing, Kaitlyn!

Linné Marsh, Fallbrook, CA

Dear *Garnish*,

Reading the April issue of *Garnish,* I was delighted with the article on chocolate. Nothing is more seductive than a steaming pan full of melted chocolate. But as mentioned in the article, cacao—the base of chocolate as we know it—is really not as delicious as one would hope. That fact reminded me of when my dad found that out the hard way.

My mother and I were making brownies from scratch. My dad would step into the kitchen every few minutes under the guise of some important business to stealthily swipe whatever edible items, finished or not, he could get into his mouth before he was caught.

The melting chocolate looked amazing. Silky, creamy, deep, rich chocolate. I withstood the temptation to steal a taste, knowing that it was still bitter. But my dad didn't. We turned to see him submerge a greedy finger into the deceptively delicious-looking chocolate. In slow motion he lustily sucked the chocolate off his finger, taunting us. With smug faces we waited for the flavor to sink into his taste buds. My dad's face transformed from a pleased look of triumph to an impossible-to-duplicate-or-describe look of disgust.

Nothing is more delicious than a surprise victory.

Paige Jones, Salem, OR

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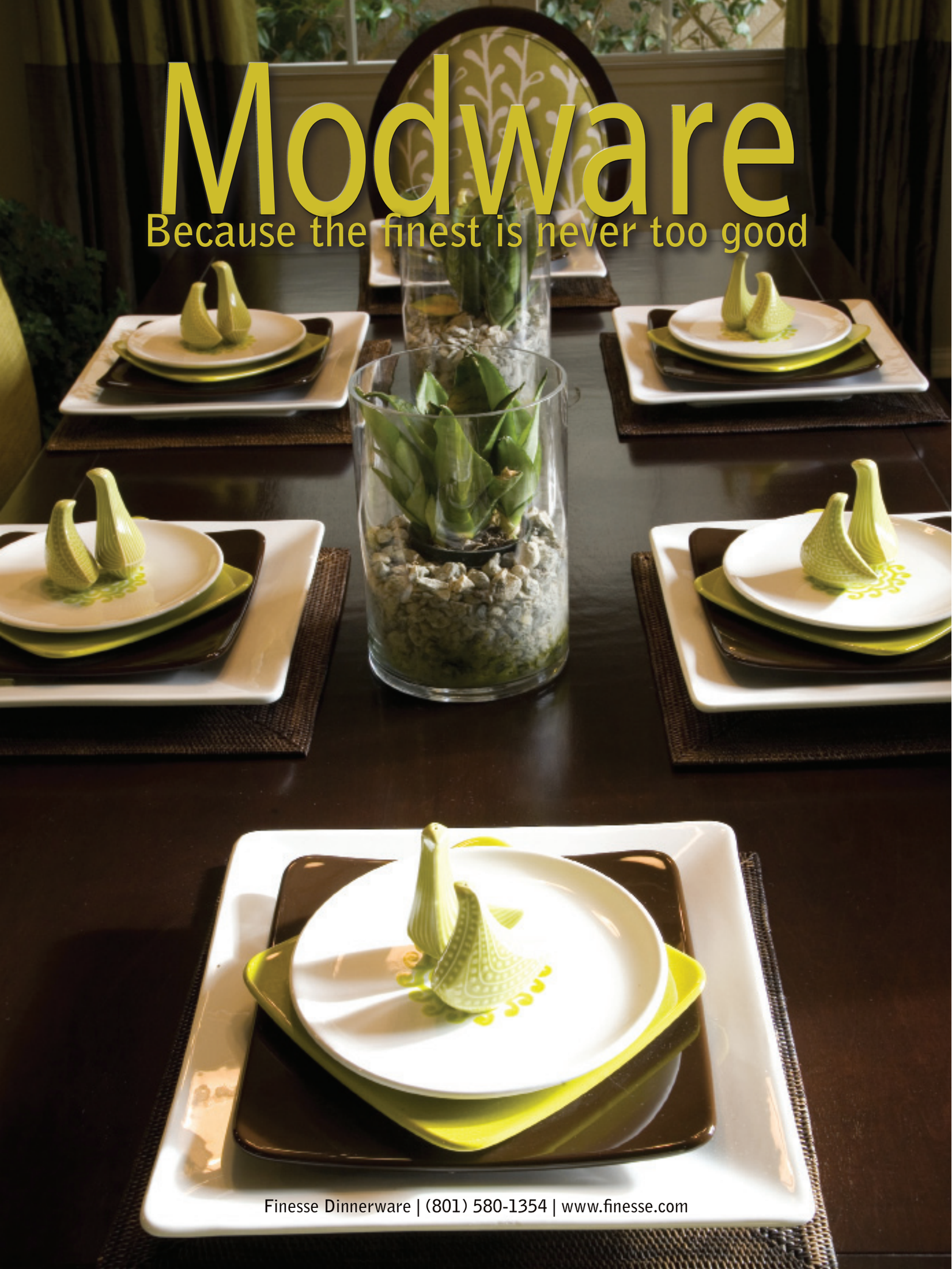
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